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There is a belief among many people that gay men are more likely to molest children than are straight men. Both gay activists and anti-gay activists claim that science is on their side, but neither side (in my experience) fully understands exactly what it is that the science actually says.

I prepared the following comment for the newsletter for GLBT psychologists' division in the American Psychological Association, who published it in 2002. I still receive questions from people asking for information that is answered in that essay, so I have also made it available here.

Male Homosexuality, Science, and Pedophilia

James M. Cantor, PhD

The stronger one is invested in the outcome of a scientific endeavor, the more vulnerable is one's ability to see straight. This is a lesson for the political left as much as it is for the political right, and in few debates are people as strongly invested as in the putative relationship between homosexuality and pedophilia. The present review summarizes the existing literature, highlighting those findings that address claims frequently made by lay audiences and the popular press, regardless of their political stripe. It is unlikely that any critical review will alter the views of those who employ data only for furthering a sociopolitical agenda. For psychologists who pursue accuracy, however, this information may serve to help combat rhetoric with data, rather than with more rhetoric.

Discussions of homosexuality and pedophilia—whether in editorial pages, listserve's, radio call-in shows, or websites—replay remarkably similar statements. Participants rely on two numbers: the proportion of gay men in the general population and the proportion of victims of childhood sexual abuse who are male. Differences in these proportions are asserted as evidence of a causal link between homosexuality and pedophilia. That is, when the proportion of male child victims exceeds the proportion of gay men in the population, some people conclude that gay men are responsible for a disproportionate number of cases of pedophilia. The counterarguments typically make claims such as, "Ninety percent of child abuse is committed by heterosexual men" (e.g., American Civil Liberties Union, 1999) and conclude that gay men are no more likely to be pedophilic than are straight men.

Interestingly, systematically collected data support the former premises but the latter conclusion: The proportion of male child victims does indeed appear to exceed the proportion of gay men in the general population, but this does not imply that gay men are any more likely to be pedophilic than are straight men.

Complete coverage of the research on the proportion of men in Western society who are gay would comprise an article in its own right. Briefly, nearly every large-scale probability survey of

sexual behavior has produced an estimate of 2–4%, including studies conducted in the United States, France, and Great Britain (e.g., ACSF Investigators, 1992; Billy, Tanfer, Grady, & Klepinger, 1993; Binson, Michaels, Stall, Coates, Gagnon, & Catania, 1995; Fay, Turner, Klassen, & Gagnon, 1989; Johnson, Wadsworth, Wellings, Bradshaw, & Field, 1992; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Space constraints prevent discussion of how the figure of 10% came into being or has been maintained. Although 10% is attributed to Alfred Kinsey, even the original Kinsey studies read, "4 per cent of the white males are exclusively homosexual throughout their lives, after the onset of adolescence" (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948, p. 651). Nonetheless, because the proportion of male child victims is much greater than 10%, the choice between 2–4% and 10% is moot for the present context.

"It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly, one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts."
—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Published estimates of the proportion of pedophiles who offend against male children and are homosexual span a staggering range from a low of 2% (Jenny, Roesler, & Poyer, 1994) to a high of 86% (Erickson, Walbek, & Seely, 1988). The methods of the authors at each extreme have been criticized, and indeed, both sides are guilty of poor methods. At the low end, Jenny et al. (1994) reviewed the hospital charts of 50 male children suspected to be victims of sexual abuse at the hands of a male adult, recording information about the perpetrators as provided by the victims' parents and other care-givers. The authors concluded that 2% of the offenders were homosexual. Of course, left unresolved is how accurate the informants were with regard to the hetero-/homosexuality of the offenders. After all, the same informants were presumably unaware of the offenders being pedophilic until the discovery of the offense. At the other end, Erickson and colleagues (Erickson et al., 1988) reported that 86% of their sample of offenders against male children were homosexual. This estimate, however, is based on the self-report of the offenders, and offenders are highly motivated to claim any self-descriptor other than pedophile. In fact, methodologically sophisticated studies of pedophiles rely solely on non-admitting pedophiles (e.g., Blanchard, Klassen, Dickey, Kuban, & Blak, 2001).

The more plausible and consistent estimates result from larger scale forensic investigations. There is little reason to suspect, for example, that the Kinsey Institute researchers demonstrated any systematic bias in recording numbers of male versus female victims when interviewing sex offenders during their original data collection (1941–1955; Gebhard, Gagnon, Pomeroy, & Christenson, 1965). As well, it is difficult to argue that an offense against a 10-year-old boy would be taken any more or less seriously than an offense against a 10-year-old girl.

Overall, the offenders against male children appear to comprise 20–30% of all offenders against children. The Kinsey Institute researchers interviewed institutionalized men, convicted of at least one sexual offense; the subjects included 199 who offended against female children under 12 and 96 who offended against male children under 12, although a subject would be included in both groups if he offended against both male and female children (Gebhard et al., 1965). An analysis of seven years of referrals to the Department of Behavioral Sexology of the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry (now the Kurt Freund Laboratory of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health) included 292 offenders against female children and 165 offenders against male children (Freund, Heasman, Racansky, & Glancy, 1984). A Sex Offender Census of all offenders in Canadian federal prisons indicated that, of those who sexually offended against a child under 12, 66.3% offended against female children only, 14.7% against male children only, and 19.0% against both (Motiuk, 1993). Interestingly, even though Jenny et al. (1994) identified 2% of the perpetrators in their sample as homosexual, 22% of the victims in the sample were male.

To this point, it does appear that the proportion of male children among all victims of childhood sexual abuse indeed exceeds the proportion of gay men among all men. It does not follow, however, that gay men are disproportionately responsible for these offenses. Scientifically informed discussion of the relationship between homosexuality and pedophilia requires (1) careful use of specific terminology and (2) an understanding of the basic structure and etiology of human sexuality. Arguments from the radical right frequently depend on their lack.

Pedophilia is having an erotic interest in children that exceeds one's erotic interest in adults (Freund, 1981); likewise, having one's primary erotic interest in adults is **teleophilia** (Blanchard et al., 2000). Note that these terms regard relative interest, not absolute levels of erotic interest (e.g., Freund, Langvin, Cibiri, & Zajac, 1973). Because non-pedophilic men do show some small response to erotic stimuli involving children, definitions based on having any interest in children at all are not meaningful. Note also that neither term makes any reference to being attracted to males versus females. Finally, remembering that the current discussion is limited to male sexual behavior, the term heterosexuality refers to having an erotic interest in females that exceeds one's erotic interest in males, and homosexuality refers to an erotic interest in males that exceeds one's erotic interest in females. Note here that these two latter terms make no reference to the age in which the person is erotically interested. (For convenience, the term gay has been used here thus far to refer specifically to homosexual teleophilia—men with a primary erotic interest in adult males.)

The basic tenet behind describing the human sexual interests under discussion here is that erotic interest in children versus adults is just as integrated into a person as is erotic interest in males versus females. Pedophilic men experience penile erections when they view erotica of children in the same way that teleophilic men experience erections when they view erotica of adults (e.g., Blanchard et al., 2001). Both gay and straight men show little reaction when viewing erotica of the less interesting age group in the same way that both gay and straight men show little reaction when viewing erotica of the less interesting sex (e.g., Freund et al., 1973; Freund, Watson, & Rienzo, 1989). Thus, describing a man's sexual interest requires naming both the sex and the age that interest him and leads to the terminology above.

It is here that the political right takes advantage of imprecise usage. Although non-specialists correctly use the word pedophile, that is, to be without regard for whether male or female children are targeted, the colloquial use of the word homosexual refers to homosexual teleophiles and not homosexual pedophiles. Thus, statements such as "6–8 million boys were abused by age 18 by 1–2 million adult homosexuals" (Walker, 2001) are half truths. Although it might be reasonably said that these perpetrators were homosexual pedophiles, there is no basis on which to believe they were homosexual teleophiles (i.e., gay men). To refer to the sex in which the offenders' were erotically interested and not the age is mere sophistry.

Given the precision used by professional sex researchers, the question 'How many gay men are pedophiles?' also evaporates. To ask 'how many gay men are pedophiles' is to ask 'how many of the men with a primary interest in adults have a primary interest in non-adults?' The answer is none. This answer, however, is not mere word-play. It is long established that both homosexual teleophiles and heterosexual teleophiles show the same (very low) level of erotic response to stimuli involving children (Freund et al., 1973). If one's primary interest is in adults, it is not in children, regardless of the child's sex.

Although having a genuine erotic interest in children is the strongest predictor of sex offender recidivism (Hanson & Bussiere, 1998), some offenders engage in their behaviors for other reasons (Barbaree & Seto, 1997). Little is known about these other offenders. It is possible that at least some are pedophilic, but lie beyond the ability of psychophysiological tests to identify them. Other factors have been suggested as causing their sexual assaults on children, including alcoholism

and anti-social personality (e.g., Marshall, 1997). It is well-established, however, that sex offenses committed by non-pedophiles are largely associated with incest, while the extra-familial offenders are more likely to be genuinely pedophilic (e.g., Blanchard et al., 2001). Furthermore, very few incest victims are male. Estimates are typically 6–8% (e.g., Carlstedt, Forsman, & Soderstrom, 2001; Langevin, Wortzman, Dickey, Wright, & Handy, 1988), substantially lower than the overall proportion of males among all victims (i.e., 20–30%). The most logical conclusion is that sex offenses comprise two phenomena: genuine pedophilia producing offenses against either male or female, extra-familial children and an incest pattern producing offenses against primarily female children. This conclusion is also consistent with the data suggesting that offenders against male children have more victims than offenders against female children. The offenders against male children are more likely to be genuinely pedophilic, while a sizeable group of the offenders against female children are incest offenders and have only a finite number of potential victims. (Additionally, incest offenders are usually removed from contact with their underage relatives after discovery of the offenses.) Nonetheless, the data provide little indication that homosexual teleophilia plays any greater role in sexual offenses by non-pedophiles than those by pedophiles.

The etiology of erotic interests contributes to the discussion because comparison of the rate of homosexuality in pedophilia to the rate of homosexuality in teleophilia implicitly assumes an etiological link. The political right asserts that homosexuality results from an arrest of normal sexual attraction. The reparative therapy movement is largely an attempt to resolve the issues that thwart expression of underlying heterosexuality. Unfortunately, the political left—rather than employ data regarding biological bases of male homosexuality—frequently silences itself with regard to etiology, typically for fear of homosexuality being re-labeled an illness.

The political right asserts that pedophilia also results from an arrest of normal sexual attraction, notwithstanding the lack of support for this view. This time, however, psychologists largely agree. Many psychologists continue to support, implicitly or explicitly, the belief that pedophilia is indeed an arrest or distortion of otherwise normal, adult-oriented sexual attractions and that resolution of the allegedly underlying issues will return the client to healthier sexual behavior with adult sexual partners. It is this belief that leads to the seemingly logical and largely unspoken thought that straight men with this alleged distortion will target female children, while gay men with this distortion will target male children. It may also be this belief that motivates psychologists and the political left to deny that seemingly large proportions of victims of childhood sexual abuse are male. The scientific error, however, is not in the measurement of sex ratios of victims, but in the failure to recognize that homosexual pedophilia and homosexual teleophilia are distinct and that humans do not shift between them. Attempts to change age-orientation have been as dismal as attempts to change sex-orientation. As a corollary, among non-specialists there also exists a general failure to recognize heterosexual pedophilia as distinct from heterosexual teleophilia.

Also embedded in this belief about etiology is that gender-orientation overrides age-orientation. That is, that homosexual pedophilia is most closely linked with homosexual teleophilia (and that heterosexual pedophilia is most closely linked with heterosexual teleophilia). The evidence suggests, however, that homosexual pedophilia is most closely linked with heterosexual pedophilia; pedophiles differentiate less between males and females than do teleophiles, when they receive a psychophysiological test of erotic preference (Freund & Langevin, 1976; Freund et al., 1991). This suggests that a pedophile would assault a child of the less preferred sex more frequently than a teleophile would become sexually involved with someone of the less preferred sex. This underscores that the proportion of homosexuality in pedophilia cannot be meaningfully compared to the proportion of homosexuality in teleophilia.

It is beyond the scope of this review to cover the various correlates associated with the development of erotic interest in males versus females and those associated with erotic interest in

adults versus children. These correlates include handedness, birth order, minor physical anomalies, IQ, cognitive patterns, etc. It is very likely that the data that will most strongly impact the future of the pedophilia/homosexuality debate are likely to be those from neuroscience. Studies of brain function have revealed certain patterns of functioning in normal gay men that differentiate them from straight men (e.g., Wegesin, 1998). Likewise, the brain functioning of pedophiles appears to differ from that of teleiophiles in yet another pattern (e.g., Cantor, Christensen, Klassen, Dickey, & Blanchard, 2001). Although homosexual teleiophiles and homosexual pedophiles have not yet been directly compared with regard to brain function and structure, it is hoped that such research will provide the most decisive data regarding the basic differentiations between them.

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